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NAVY MEDICINE IN FOCUS

## Navy medicine in the field

BY VJOHNSON – MAY 22, 2014  
POSTED IN: FEATURES

By Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class John Sorenson

Two weeks each year, Sailors from around the country gather here to attend Northern Lights, an annual Navy Reserve medical training exercise May 1 through 14 hosted by Expeditionary Medical Facility Great Lakes One, a Navy Reserve expeditionary medical unit based out of Great Lakes, Ill.

The purpose of the exercise is to provide practical experience in the Expeditionary Medical Facility environment. Training is conducted under rugged conditions, in a simulated wartime environment. A great deal of training material is covered in a short period of time, resulting in a strenuous training schedule.

"This is an incredible exercise," said Rear Adm. Victor Hall, deputy commander for Navy Medicine West.



Lt. Hillary Brainard, and Capt. Edwin Turner, Emergency Room Department Head discuss a patient's condition with Sailors attached to Expeditionary Medical Force One during Operation Northern Lights. Northern Lights is an annual Navy Reserve Medical training exercise hosted at Fort McCoy, Wis., by Expeditionary Medical Facility Great Lakes One, a Navy Reserve expeditionary medical unit based out of Great Lakes, Ill. The purpose of this training exercise is to provide practical experience in the Expeditionary Medical Facility environment. (Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class John Sorensen).

From the most junior Sailor to the seasoned surgeon, Hall had nothing but praise for the men and women of Northern Lights.

"It really shows the public what Navy Reserve Medicine is capable of doing."

A total of 215 Sailors are assigned to one of three phases of training. The first involved setting up of the hospital facility. This included construction of a 44-bed tent compound, which consists of a triage area, emergency room, operating room, intensive care unit, acute care ward, pharmacy, radiology, laboratory and supply departments.

The next phase placed an emphasis on utilizing the spaces. The Sailors treated simulated casualties with little to no warning of their arrival. The "casualties" arrived by U.S. Army Reserve HH-60 Black Hawk helicopter or Humvee ambulance 24 hours a day and simulated just about every battlefield injury.



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The litter team from Expeditionary Medical Force Great Lakes One performs triage on a casualty delivered by a U.S. Army HH-60 Black Hawk helicopter on Forward Operating Base Liberty during Operation Northern Lights. The aircraft is a vital part of battlefield medicine, as it is used to transport casualties to field medical centers.  
(Photo by Ensign Christopher Hanson)

Lt. Cmdr. Rodolfo Caños, whose civilian specialty is as a pediatric and psychiatric nurse practitioner, served as the officer-in-charge of Northern Lights. He explained the third phase of the exercise.

“The last phase is a continuation of the second with more focus on mass-casualty care,” he said. “This is the point in the exercise where we prove we can go anywhere and provide the best care for our warriors.”

Other participants confirmed how important the training aspect was to the execution of the exercise.

“This is very good training for the reserve Sailors who have not been to a combat zone,” said Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Matthew Hill of St. Louis.

Hill is a first-time participant in Northern Lights. He recently spent time in Afghanistan, where he did exactly what these Sailors are training to do. The tasks ranged from assessing vital signs to treating compound fractures and simulated battle injuries.



Sailors attached to Expeditionary Medical Force One participate in an emergency room simulation during Operation Northern Lights. There is classroom instruction, simulated training and practical experience in field hospital operation and patient care services.  
(Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class John Sorensen)

The Sailors also experienced the many levels of combat medicine training.

“They are here to learn,” said Capt. Edwin Turner of St. Paul, Minn., the emergency room department head. “It’s up to you to do what’s right for your patient.”

The intent of the exercise was to create a fast-paced, combat zone experience. Turner stepped into the role of an instructor and trainer. He continuously questioned his staff and reminded them they are in charge of the necessary information.

“How long ago did you send for an X-ray? What is the patient’s blood type? What is the next thing you are going to do for this patient?” he asked.

With the training the Sailors received, they will be capable of performing the basic and tactical operations to prepare a Navy Expeditionary Medical Facility for worldwide deployment. Military medicine is a joint effort and part of its readiness includes being able to work with the other services. Northern Lights was just one facet of a larger exercise involving the Army, Air Force and the Navy.

“These three services work in tandem, all-the-while keeping focused on the welfare of our warriors,” Caños said. “This is probably one of the biggest missions of its kind.”

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